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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 002922

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2026  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CVIS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI AND HAMADEH GIVE POST-BLOCKADE  
THOUGHTS

REF: BEIRUT 2867

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) Ambassador and poloff met separately on 9/9 with parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri and Minister of Information Marwan Hamadeh -- both March 14 members -- to review the situation and next steps in Lebanon now that the air and sea blockades have been lifted. Both meetings touched on a range of topics, including March 14 activities, the Brammertz Commission and the special tribunal, reconstruction, the Sheba'a Farms, and the prospect of Aounist-provoked social unrest, among other issues. Both Hariri and Hamadeh appeared confident and in high spirits.  
END SUMMARY.

BUILDING MARCH 14 APPEAL  
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¶2. (C/NF) Hariri and the Walid Jumblatt-allied Hamadeh remarked that the March 14 group -- following the September 7 Bristol Hotel meeting -- will now engage in outreach activities to try and bring other groups under the March 14 umbrella. Hariri noted that he would meet discreetly with a group of Shi'a clerics and intellectuals disgruntled with Hizballah in order to cultivate these contacts. He added that he will try and get other Arab nations -- he mentioned Egypt and Saudi Arabia -- to meet with and "nurture" Shi'a opposed to continued Hizballah militancy. Hariri said he speaks with Nabih Berri at least once a day, but added that, in the context of his Shi'a dialogue, he would be "opening up" again to Hizballah. "Though not to Nasrallah," he hastened to add.

¶3. (C/NF) Hamadeh also mentioned that the vocally pro-GOL senior Lebanese Shi'i cleric Ali al-Amin was recently given air time with a prominent Sunni interviewer on al-Arabiyya (implying that Saad had something to do with this). He said that the plan is to "let the Shi'a community simmer for awhile" in the hopes that the Shi'a will develop an internal opposition to Hizballah "sui generis." According to Hamadeh, Saudi Arabia has begun "putting money into Lebanon against Iran" -- separate from the \$500 million Riyadh has already

pledged for reconstruction -- primarily to Sunni, Christian, and Druze charitable institutions. Hamadeh praised Saad for encouraging Saudi support, but warned of a danger of Saad losing Sunni constituents in northern Lebanon to al-Qaeda-style extremism or to Syria, or both.

¶4. (C/NF) Hamadeh noted that Jumblatt had wanted to invite the Lebanese Sunni Jima'a Islamiyya (Islamic Group) to the March 14 meeting, but that Hariri had not wanted to upset Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Hamadeh added that a public embrace of the Jima'a would frighten the Christians -- already faced with the specter of Shi'a radicalism -- even more than they already are and would provide Michel Aoun with extra ammunition to decry a Sunni plot to take over Lebanon. Instead, Hamadeh said that he will consult with the Jima'a in parallel to March 14 activities. (Note. In an aside, Hamadeh noted that Ali Bayanuni had been reelected as head of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood by an overwhelming majority. Hamadeh found this particularly interesting because it had been done against the will of the Egyptian Brotherhood. End Note.) Saad also remarked that a "follow-up committee" to the March 14 meeting would visit the Jima'a, as well as Patriarch Sfeir, Nabih Berri, and foreign embassies.

#### FAST TRACK THE TRIBUNAL

¶5. (C/NF) Raising the matter of the special tribunal to try suspects in the murder of his father, Saad asked that the draft statute be fast-tracked at the UN so that it can be returned to the Lebanese Cabinet, which Saad is confident will promptly give its approval. He mentioned that President Chirac called UNSYG Annan on 9/8 to press for this. "We need

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the U.S. to push it too," Saad added, "The sooner the better." Hamadeh also pressed for rapid UN action and does not have any doubts of GOL approval of the statute. He said there is nothing to be concerned about Berri's apparent unwillingness to meet with UN Legal Adviser Nicholas Michel during his 9/7 visit to Beirut -- "Berri assured us he is still with the tribunal."

¶6. (C/NF) Hamadeh said he met with a team of investigators from UNIIIC for over five hours on 9/8. Commissioner Serge Brammertz claims to have received all the personnel he needs to follow-up on various leads, according to Hamadeh, who remarked that he was interviewed by a Tunisian investigator and that "all the questions were about Syria." Hamadeh said he had been greatly surprised by this Syria focus, noting that there was "not a question that didn't focus on Rustom (Ghazaleh), Bashar's meeting (in late August 2004, when he reportedly threatened Rafik Hariri), and Ghazi Kanaan." Several of the questions were focused on the week leading up to Hariri's death, Hamadeh said, when Hariri had met with Rustom Ghazaleh and outright refused to agree to Ghazaleh's preferences for electoral lists for the upcoming parliamentary elections. (Note. Interestingly, Saad said he has not once been met with UNIIIC investigators since Brammertz took over from Detlev Mehlis. End Note.)

#### PANIC IN THE STREETS?

¶7. (C/NF) Regarding the rumor that Michel Aoun intends to launch a civil disobedience campaign after Ramadan, both Hariri and Hamadeh seemed confident that the GOL can face down this threat. Hariri thinks that the Aounists will not be able to launch the protests, while Hamadeh noted that they will not have the "popular stamina" to sustain a campaign long enough to cause the GOL to topple, and that the March 14 movement could rally support. "We will walk on Ba'abda (Presidential palace) if anyone makes a demonstration," warned Hamadeh, "We will make a counter-demonstration." The Ambassador suggested to both that, as a precautionary measure, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) stationed in

downtown Beirut should be replaced by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), since it is also rumored that the Aounists intend to provoke the Hariri-allied ISF into firing on protestors, sparking a violent chain reaction with the ultimate aim of forcing Siniora's resignation. By contrast, the Aounists have respect for the LAF. Hariri also took the opportunity to ask the Ambassador again for USG assistance in procuring needed equipment for both the LAF and ISF.

18. (C/NF) Both Hariri and Hamadeh seem pleased with LAF commander Michel Sleiman, who Hamadeh said had played a more positive role in the recent Cabinet meeting deciding maritime assistance than had Defense Minister Elias Murr (contrary to Murr's assertions to us (reftel)). Hamadeh said that he interprets the Cabinet decision as allowing international ships to patrol freely in the 6 to 12 mile zone of Lebanese waters, but that the LAF alone has the right to stop, inspect, and seize ships. Hamadeh warned of a potential backdoor; since international patrols will not be permitted inside a zone stretching six miles from Lebanon's coastline, ships coming south from Syria's Mediterranean ports could easily avoid UNIFIL-patrolled waters. He noted that the Germans, too, are concerned about this, which Hamadeh hopes will lead to a solution.

#### SHEBA'A INITIATIVE NEEDS UN COVER

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19. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked both Hamadeh and Hariri what they thought of Israeli PM Olmert's 9/8 suggestion of a potential deal on Sheba'a if Hizballah were disarmed and Syria were to send a formal letter to the UN saying that the territory is Lebanese. Hamadeh suggested that this issue can be developed, but not immediately following Olmert's statement. Sensitive to Lebanese internal consumption, Hamadeh said that a Sheba'a farms deal "should not look like an Israeli initiative," suggesting that something might be done after Kofi Annan's upcoming UNSCR 1701 report. Hariri

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also said this should appear to be a UN-generated initiative, but added that "if Olmert is serious, and the U.S. can give some kind of guarantee," then he is prepared to consult with Nabih Berri on opening a debate in Lebanon to corner Hizballah into disarming. Hariri tipped his cap to his southern neighbor - "It is very smart of Olmert to say this."

110. (C/NF) The Ambassador suggested that it would build a measure of trust with Israel were some kind of progress to be made regarding the captive IDF soldiers, such as -- at the very least -- a videotape showing they are still alive or an ICRC visit. Hariri half-heartedly agreed to talk to Berri about this issue as well, but remarked that "Nabih doesn't want to get involved with the prisoners," adding that "Nabih's so upset with Hizballah and the statements they've made."

#### PROBLEMS WITH RECONSTRUCTION

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111. (C/NF) On the topic of reconstruction, Hamadeh noted that the "centralization spirit" of PM Siniora has hampered the effort, and that Siniora is having problems now with some of his ministers -- Hamadeh mentioned specifically Transportation Minister Mohammad Safadi, Minister for Displaced Naame Tohmeh, and Minister for Social Affairs Nayla Mouawad. Hamadeh said that many destroyed buildings in the southern suburbs had been built illegally on private land, which complicates the rebuilding effort. For instance, Hizballah headquarters -- the now destroyed "murabba' amni" (security square) -- had ironically been built, squatter-style, on Christian-owned land. According to Hamadeh, Nabih Berri is playing an active role in civic redesign of the southern suburbs, preferring to put in more open spaces such as gardens and squares, thereby decreasing overcrowding.

GHAZI ARIDI: SIGNALLING A JUMBLATT SHIFT?

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¶12. (C/NF) The Ambassador asked about the recent, Hizballah-like anti-American comments of Information Minister Ghazi Aridi (a supposed Jumblatt ally), and whether this foreshadowed a future and not atypical volte face for Jumblatt back into a less U.S.-inclined camp. Hamadeh -- the pro-American Jumblatt ally -- noted that Aridi had not attended the March 14 gathering and does not reflect Jumblatt's attitude, but is merely freelancing for attention.

Hariri though suggested that Jumblatt uses Hamadeh and Aridi to reflect different messages in order to keep a foot in both camps. Both Hamadeh and Hariri promised to speak with Aridi and ask him to tone it down. (Note. We plan to visit Aridi soon to protest his recent change of tone. End Note.)

Hamadeh added that Jumblatt hopes to travel to the U.S. soon, perhaps following the UN General Assembly (Note. Hariri asked if there is a "problem with Jumblatt's visa," indicating that Jumblatt has mentioned potential travel to him as well. End Note.)

FELTMAN